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Albatross Pictures

BY WALTER K. FISHER

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

I have ventured to reprint the illustrations of my article in the January, 1904, *Auk*, "On the Habits of the Laysan Albatross," hoping that the pictures will be of interest to those readers of THE CONDOR who do not regularly see our standard journal of ornithology. The following brief synopsis of the pictures is not intended to be an exposition of the habits of that most entertaining bird, *Diomedea immutabilis*, but rather a scenario, as it were, of its somewhat theatrical



FIG. 1. ROOKERY OF LAYSAN ALBATROSSES

performances. Something has already been said concerning the general aspects of the bird life on Laysan, in the May and July numbers of THE CONDOR.

The first picture shows a portion of one of the larger rockeries of *Diomedea immutabilis*, near the southern end of the islet. Here, in years gone by, Japanese laborers have cleared away all the loose phosphate rock leaving a level area many acres in extent. The albatrosses have entirely preempted the site. In the distance may be discerned the sandy slope of the island, corresponding to the sides of a meat platter, which the atoll greatly resembles in general form. In the foreground is seen loose phosphate rock and one of the characteristic bushes of the island, *Chenopodium sandwicheum*, a sort of pigweed. Figure 2 is one of the young albatrosses in the foreground of 1. Most of the birds in sight are young, since the photograph was taken in the morning before the adults had returned from the

^aWith the exception of the frontispiece these illustrations are from plates kindly loaned me by Dr. J. A. Allen and Mr. Frank M. Chapman, editors of THE AUK.



FIG. 2. PORTRAIT OF YOUNG LAYSAN ALBATROSS

fishings grounds. Note the characteristic position of the young bird, teetering back on its heels.

The gones are sprinkled rather thickly all over the island, on the windy slope facing the sea, on the inner sandy slopes among the tall grass, and around the



FIG. 3. NEAR THE LAGOON, LAYSAN



FIG. 4. A CORNER IN ONE OF THE COLONIES



FIG. 5. AMONG THE LAYSAN ALBATROSSES



FIG. 6. FIRST STAGE IN DANCE, FENCING

central lagoon in the level portion of the islet. Figure 3 is a small section of the great colony which encircles the lagoon. This photograph was taken in the afternoon, practically all of the adults having returned. To the left will be seen a

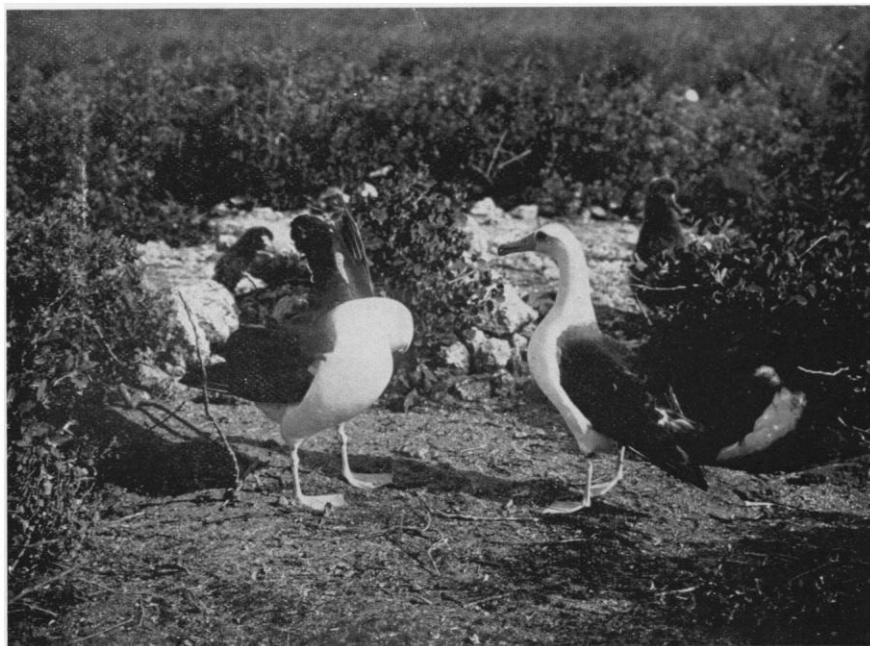


FIG. 7. SECOND STEP IN DANCE

youngster sitting in one of the bowl-like hollows which serve the albatrosses as nests. Two others, unoccupied, will be seen directly over the nestling's head. The young bird near the center, middle distance, also occupies a 'nest' and belongs to the two old birds standing near. Figure 4 is a corner in one of the colonies near a little brackish pond. The young bird in the foreground is practising its wings and is just beginning to stand upright. This picture was taken soon after the young had been fed, about ten in the morning. Both old and young rest at this time, and the adults frequently go to sleep with the bill and one eye hidden by the wing.

Figure 5 demonstrates the remarkable indifference exhibited by the birds to human presence. The writer is making some small noise to attract the bird's attention. At the left two birds are about to commence a dance. Note the absolute fearlessness of the young as shown by their pose. It was near this spot that an



FIG. 8. LAST STAGE IN DANCE—ONE SINGING, THE OTHER SNAPPING BEAK

old albatross became greatly interested in the bright aluminum top of my tripod, which it carefully examined from all sides. Finally it tested the cap with its beak, and appeared much surprised, yet pleased, with the jingling sound, repeating the experiment until satisfied.

The gonies indulge in a curious dance, which probably originated during the courting season, but which now seems to be practised all through the year for the sake of amusement. That the habit is very old and deep-seated is proved by the fact that such widely different species as *Diomedea nigripes* (Laysan) and *D. irrorata* (Galapagos Is.) likewise indulge in the diversion. Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9 are successive steps in the performance. Two birds approach one another, bowing profoundly and stepping heavily. They swagger about each other nodding and courtesying solemnly, then suddenly begin to fence a little, crossing bills and

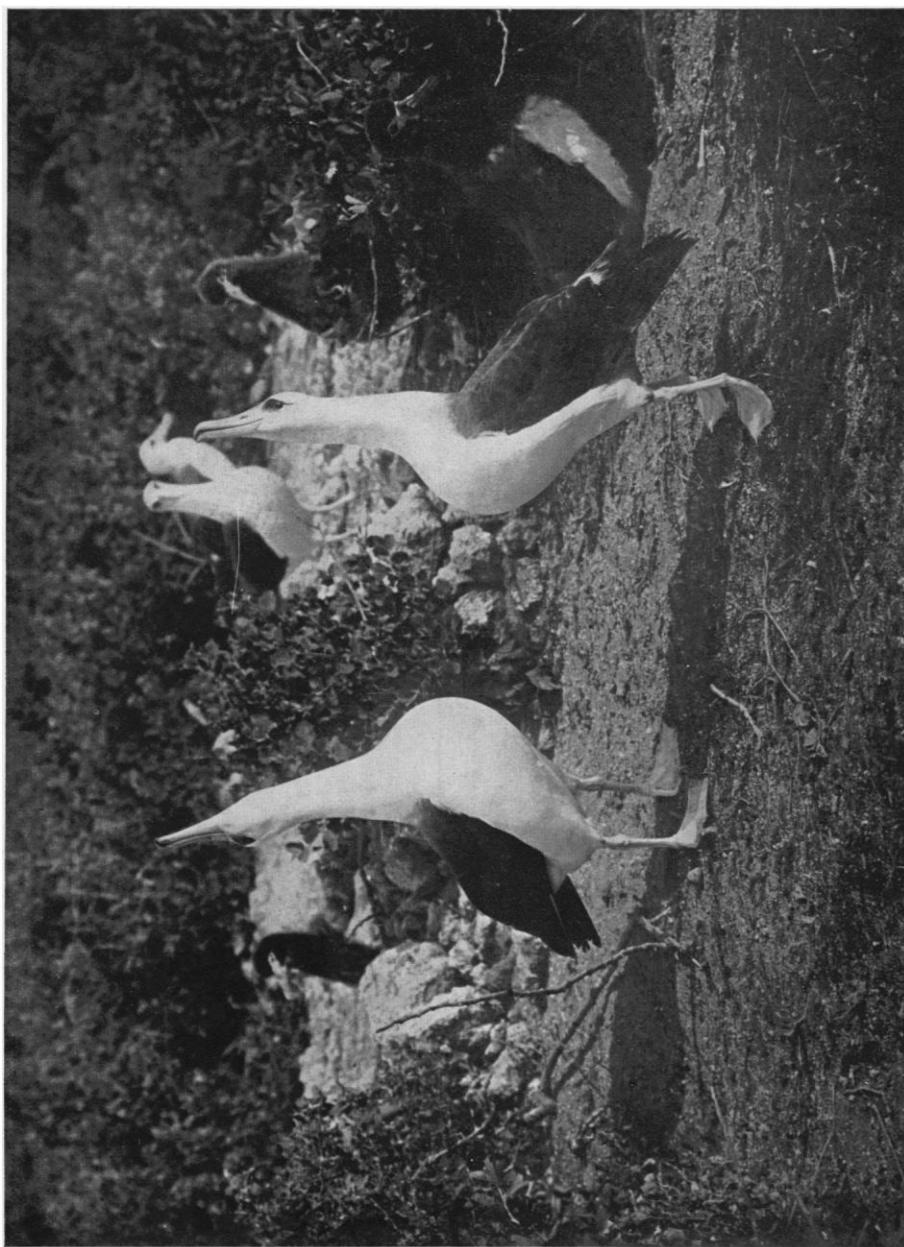


FIG. 9. FINALE OF ALBATROSS DANCE—THE DUET



FIG. 10. YOUNG ALBATROSS ASKING FOR FOOD

whetting them together, sometimes with a whistling sound, meanwhile pecking and dropping stiff little bows. (Fig. 6.) All at once one lifts its closed wing and nibbles at the feathers beneath, or rarely, if in a hurry, quickly turns its head.



FIG. 11. OLD BIRD STARTING TO DISGORGE

The partner during this short performance assumes a statuesque pose and either looks mechanically from side to side or snaps its bill loudly a few times. (Fig. 7.) Then the first bird (to the left of the picture) bows once and pointing its head and beak straight upward, rises on its toes, puffs out its breast, and utters a prolonged nasal *Ah-h-h-h* with a rapidly rising inflection, and with a distinctly 'anserine' and 'bovine' quality, quite difficult to describe. While this song is being uttered, the companion loudly and rapidly snaps its bill. (Fig. 8.) Sometimes both birds raise their heads in the air, and either one or both utter the curious groan. (Fig. 9.) Figures 6, 7, and 9 are of the same pair of birds. Three sometimes engage in the dance, one dividing its attention between two until it tires and finally deserts one of the partners, to devote its entire attention to the other. If a person bows to the birds while they are engaged in "cake-walking" or soon after they have finished, they will usually bow in return and walk around in a puzzled sort of way. It would seem that whenever they behold anything bowing, a sort of reflex stimulus is set up in their own bodies.



DIOMEDEA NIGRIPES PUNISHING STRANGE YOUNG

The gonies depend entirely upon squids for food. That the number of these cephalopods in the surrounding waters must be very great is suggested by the fact that the approximate million of albatrosses on the island consume, allowing from one-half to one and one-half pounds of food a day to each individual, between 250 and 600 tons daily. As the squids are nocturnal or crepuscular in habits the albatrosses fish after dark, most probably from just preceding dawn till light. They return to the island, from long distances, and feed the young anytime during the early forenoon. The old bird alights near the impatient and greedy nestling, who immediately takes the initiative by waddling up and pecking or biting gently at her beak. (Fig. 10.) She now stands up, and with head lowered and wings held loosely at the sides regurgitates a bolus of squids and oil. (Fig. 11). Just as she opens her beak, the young one who has been standing ready inserts its own crosswise, and skillfully catches every morsel, which it bolts with evident relish. (Frontispiece.)

Albatrosses have a habit of maltreating their neighbors' children, particularly just after they have fed their own young and while the latter are still annoying them by petitioning for more. The old bird having repeated the process shown in the illustrations some eight or ten times finds herself pumped quite empty. She now pecks back at her nestling, or runs off and trounces some neighboring young, provided the parents are absent. Figure 12 shows a black-footed albatross (*Diomedea nigripes*), a species which lives only on the beaches near the water, wooling and mauling a nestling. Its own young is seen at a little distance.

The albatrosses pursue their varied occupations on Laysan for ten months of each year, and during September and October spread far and wide over the north Pacific for a short vacation.

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An Early Notice of Philippine Birds

BY RICHARD C. MCGREGOR

IN the library of the Ethnological Survey in Manila is a curious old set of quarto volumes containing "A Collection of Voyages and Travels"^a to all parts of the world, including accounts of shipwrecks, fights with pirates, and other adventures by land and sea. In the fourth volume is given the narrative of Dr. John Careri,^b "A Doctor of the Civil Law, well provided with Mony to make him acceptable in all Parts," who through crosses at home was led to make a journey round the world. He left Italy, his native land, in 1693 and returned in 1699. His quaint observations on all manner of things in the countries he visited are entertaining if of no more value. He spent some time in the Philippines during the years 1696 and '97. His account of the birds seems to be worth reproduction as containing very early notices of several well known species. The account of the birds begins on page 454 as follows:

"Among the Birds of the Islands the *Tavon*^c deserves to have special Mention

^a A Collection of Voyages and Travels. | Some now first Printed from *Original Manuscripts.* | Others Translated out of Foreign Languages, and now | first published in English. | To which are added some few that have formerly ap- | pear'd in English, but do now for their Excellency | and Scarce ness deserve to be Reprinted. [rule] In Four Volumes. [rule] With a General PREFACE, giving an Account of the NAVIGATION, from its first Beginning to the Perfection it is now in, &c. [rule] The whole Illustrated with a great Number of Useful Maps and Cuts, all Engraven on Copper. [rule] The Authors contain'd in this Volume, see over Leaf. [rule] Vol. IV. [rule] London: | Printed by H. C. for A.W.N. SHAM and JOHN CHURCHILL at | the Black-Swan in Pater-noster-Row, MDCCIV. Although projected in four volumes there were added four more making eight in the set examined. The title pages differ in some of the later volumes.

^b A Voyage round the World, by Dr. John Francis Gemelli Careri, containing the most remarkable Things in Turkey, Persia, India, China, the Philippine-Islands and New Spain. Translated from the Italian. (pp. 1-605) It is not stated where this was first published. Perhaps it was never printed in the original.

^c *Megapodius cumingi* Dillwyn. Of the family Megapodidae or mound-builders, including 7 genera all confined to the Oriental and Australian Regions. The genus *Megapodius*, according to Sharpe, contains 17 species, distributed from the Mariannes to Australia. Six species are found in New Guinea, but five of these range to other islands. *M. cumingi* is the only species recognized in the Philippines where it occurs on nearly all the islands. Both from the name given and the description of the peculiar nesting habits there is no doubt that our author refers to this bird. The bird is very generally called "Tabon," but "v" and "b" being more or less interchangeable in the native dialects will account for his calling it "Tavon." It has nothing to do with a "Sea Fowl" as we understand that term. It is plainly colored and might be described as black. The neck and legs, however, are not long tho' it does have very heavy feet and long strong claws. The description of the nesting habits is accurate enough but the nests are by no means always near the water and it is doubtful if anything short of a tidal wave would trouble them. The wonderful embryology, as described, is needless to say is a pure fabrication. The tabon probably nests throughout the year. I have taken eggs in May and in October.



A LAYSAN ALBATROSS FEEDING ITS YOUNG

Photographed by Walter K. Fisher